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# Executive Summary

Major Incident Review-3200 Mill Creek Road

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## Introduction

On March 14, 2019 at 08:36 hours, a house fire was dispatched in the area of 3200 Mill Creek Road. The fire resulted in the serious injury of a volunteer firefighter from the Minquas Fire Company of Newport, as well as significant damage to the structure. Following the incident, Fire Chief Joe Stewart of the Mill Creek Fire Company contacted Director Robert Newnam of the Delaware State Fire School to assemble a group to review the incident. This report is the result of that request. The information in this document was gathered from multiple interviews of those involved in the incident, the fire investigation report filed by the Delaware State Fire Marshal's Office, media from the incident from various sources, photos and video taken by the committee, and policy documentation from the agencies involved.

## The Incident

As units from the dispatched companies arrived, they found a fire in an older home located on a rural road. The closest hydrant did not appear on maps and was spotted by the first engine from Mill Creek as they drove past it. They broadcast its location over the radio for the next engine to lay a supply line from it. Hockessin's tanker took that assignment.

As the crews from Mill Creek, Elsmere, and Minquas entered the building to extinguish the fire and search for occupants, they lost water in their attack line. The supply line had not yet been established. A crew from Minquas entered the fire room to search for victims and one of them fell through a weakened floor. He became stuck long enough to sustain severe burns before falling through to the first floor and exiting the structure. During this process a mayday was declared by several firefighters near him and was acknowledged by the dispatch center and incident commander, however by the time it was announced over the operational channel by the dispatch center the mayday had been cleared. The injured firefighter was transported to a medical facility for treatment.

Following the mayday, the incident commander issued repeated orders to withdraw from the building. Several firefighters from different companies chose to ignore these orders. This delayed attacking the fire with large streams from the outside while they waited for everyone to get out.

The water supply issues continued after the mayday. The tanker from Hockessin was hooked up incorrectly whereby water came from the hydrant but could not be passed on to the Mill Creek engine

attacking the fire. This went on for some time and was only resolved when they bypassed Hockessin's tanker and used units from Christiana (on the second alarm). The fire was eventually extinguished using both exterior and interior streams. The structure was overhauled and turned over to the fire marshal.

## Observations

There were several items at this incident worth noting:

- Closest station (Mill Creek station 2) failed to respond with fire apparatus
- Overall staffing was good with some minor exceptions
- There were several issues involving water supply
- Stations were "double-pulled" on the second alarm
- A complete size up of the structure was not completed
- Command vehicles were on site but not utilized
- There was no tactical supervision beyond command
- Tactical assignments laid out in the county policy document were not completed
- The statewide mayday policy was initiated but some weaknesses need to be addressed
- Several firefighters were wearing noncompliant equipment or were wearing gear improperly
- There was no accountability established until late in the incident
- There was a willful disregard for orders given by officers

## Recommendations

Several recommendations were developed based on the observations in the report. These include areas that require some training, policy development at the county level, fire ground accountability, and deployment of resources. Many of these recommendations refer back to systemic issues within the fire service in New Castle County and the State of Delaware.

## For More Information

<https://statefireschool.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2019/08/Mill-Creek-Incident-Review-Report-2019.pdf>